



The Relationship Between *Muhasabah* in Sufi Psychology and Self-Regulation

Zehra Dağlıoğlu-Kaşgar

Marmara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Turkey

Abstract

The fast-paced nature of modern life and constant stimuli make it difficult for individuals to manage immediate impulses, focus attention, and regulate behavior in line with their goals. To address these challenges, modern psychology emphasizes “self-regulation” and “self-control” mechanisms that enable individuals to actively manage cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. In contrast, within Sufi psychology, *muhasabah* (self-accounting)—systematized by scholars such as al-Muhasibi and al-Ghazali—is conceptualized as a systematic method of spiritual self-discipline (education of the *nafs*) based on the continuous evaluation of one's intentions, behaviors, and internal states. This study, from the perspective of the psychology of religion, conceptually links *muhasabah*—a foundational self-discipline practice in classical Sufism—with the self-regulation theories of Albert Bandura and Barry Zimmerman. The conceptual analysis suggests that *muhasabah* and modern self-regulation share strong structural parallels, as both rely on the individual's capacity to alter internal responses, focus attention, and take strategic steps. However, while modern psychology primarily approaches self-regulation through individual goals and behavioral control, Sufi *muhasabah* is grounded in a transcendent purpose, seeking divine pleasure and moral maturation. In conclusion, *muhasabah* can be conceptualized as a spiritually grounded form of self-regulation. In light of these findings, this study aims to contribute to conceptual debates on Sufi psychology and establish a theoretical foundation for interdisciplinary research on the psychological functions of spiritual practices.

Keywords: Islamic psychology; muraqaba; nafs; psychology of religion; self-control